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WHEREWITH SHALL WE BE CLOTHED?

ANONYMOUS

It is easy to imagine how grotesque and out of place this article will appear surrounded by discussions of more serious school problems. I am going to write of the external rather than the internal preparation of the teacher for the day's work. I am tempted to use "For Women Only" as a subtitle, but knowing something of men, I am inclined to fear that the careful perusal of this paper sure to follow would simply be a waste of their time.

My remarks, I shall merely state, will more naturally concern the women teachers. Men, by some fortunate circumstance, are not required to devote much of their time to the question of apparel. If they are clean, well pressed, and carefully brushed they call forth little or no adverse comment from their very critical audience of high-school boys and girls. It is noticeable, nevertheless, that when a man teacher appears wearing a new suit or a particularly fetching tie, there is probably no student in his classes who fails to notice the change. However, they escape the censure that falls upon the feminine members of our profession.

No matter how clean and well brushed we are as we appear before our classes, if we persist in donning the same clothes day after day, we are criticized. You may say that it ought not to be necessary to dress up for your students but I maintain that it is at least important. I know that many a teacher works upon the theory that by continuously wearing the same suit or dress she makes herself inconspicuous in her room and therefore feels that the interest of the students is not distracted by her appearance. I overheard this remark the other day outside the door of such a teacher and wished heartily that I could pass it on to her without losing her friendship. Two girls paused before going in and one said feelingly, "If Miss B—— has that same skirt and waist on again today, I think I'll scream."

I knew just how she felt for I had too many teachers of that kind when I was in school. There was one who wore a dark blue

voile dress all fall, a blue serge all winter, and went back to the voile in the spring. Her classes were dull and uninteresting to me though she was a good teacher and taught my favorite study. I was often lost for long minutes as I visualized her in something soft and silky and pink or any color but blue. I didn't expect her to have the changes of a moving-picture star but I did want the dreadful monotony of her appearance relieved. I was heartily sick of the same tucks in the same place and the button that eternally threatened to come off and never did. So I could imagine the sensation that the girl felt when she entered Miss B——'s room to find her in the usual brown suit-skirt and the usual tan waist. I could appreciate the depression that settled upon that girl as the class began.

On the other hand, we have a teacher in our building, Miss C——, who realizes that the spirit in her room and the work of her students is affected by her personal appearance. She is not extravagant and her clothes are neither flashy nor cheap, but she somehow manages to vary her costume continually. As she supports a mother and sends a brother to college, it is obvious that she has no large amount of money left from her salary to spend on clothes.

Each fall Miss C—— has a new "school skirt." It is not so unusual in style that she cannot use it longer than one season; she usually has three good-looking separate skirts. Her waists are plain but numerous, made, I should suppose, by her own hands or her mother's. She does not limit herself to severely tailored waists, but has several soft silks, not georgette, but the heavier sort of silk materials. She varies the waists further by wearing different colored bows or pins. Her shoes, of which she has two pairs each season, are always neat and well polished. Last winter she had three dresses, a blue serge, a khaki jersey, and a black silk poplin, the latter two left from the winter before. She never wore the same dress twice in one week. In the spring and early fall she has simple pink and blue gingham dresses and white skirts which are always scrupulously clean. I believe she has vowed that she will never wear exactly the same thing two consecutive days. To make her costumes still more attractive, she wears flowers in season. Added to this, she uses a very delicate sachet, distinctive but in no way offensive.

Miss C—— is not a better teacher than Miss B——. She is not more brilliant and her subject is generally conceded by high-school students to be "dry." Nevertheless, there is a noticeable change as Miss B——'s classes pass to Miss C——'s room. It is sort of a game to guess what she will be wearing. The students immediately focus their eyes on her and she has their attention all ready and waiting when she takes up the lesson. The fact that she is nicely and differently dressed each day does not distract from the business of the classroom. One can look and listen at the same time; in fact, the easier the teacher is to look at, the easier it is to listen to her, and goodness knows many of us cannot depend upon our beauty or the absorbing interest of our subject-matter to hold the attention of our classes.

I can hear the sniffs that some of you are making as you read! I don't have to use much imagination either, for there are plenty of sniffs and other signs of scorn in Miss C——'s vicinity. Miss B—— considers her flip (the term is her own) and frivolous. She calls her careful costuming, her flowers, and her sachet "cheap bids for popular favor." She has a certain following and it is amusing to watch their eyebrows when Miss C—— appears in a particularly attractive dress. They overlook the results that Miss C—— accomplishes. Her courses are popular though they are exceedingly "stiff" and she is the teacher who is invariably selected to chaperon the girls when they go into the city to attend the theater or to take parties of the young people on their picnics and sleigh-rides. She is what many of our boys and girls call a "regular" teacher. I am not foolish enough to believe that her clothes are entirely responsible for this, but they do give her students the idea that she is an approachable human being and not a ready-made machine that grinds out dates and rules. She is interested in things that interest them—she is just an adult girl and they know and like it. At this age boys and girls are particularly concerned about their personal appearance. Miss C—— capitalizes this natural interest! Why not?

Perhaps she goes to the extreme. Personally I had rather err in her direction. I do not advocate elaborate clothing for the school-room. Teachers know how to dress but they reserve their nice clothes for outsiders who, oftentimes, are not nearly so appreciative of them as their students. At a recent convention, I was impressed

anew with the fact that it is hard to find a better dressed lot of women anywhere than those who assemble at a teachers' meeting.

In school, however, we are too fond of wearing old clothes—the cast-offs of seasons before. “It’s still good enough for school” is altogether too common an expression. Isn’t it rather unfair to the young people who see us so seldom in our “Sunday clothes”? Our first duty is to them and I contend that they deserve to see us at our best. They dress carefully for school and we enjoy seeing them in their pretty clothes. A fresh waist oftener than Mondays and Wednesdays, an almost daily, if not daily, change of apparel or the change of some detail of yesterday’s costume will go far toward making our students more interested and receptive.